science note

A Saga of Nesting Kookaburras

by L. E. Crawford
Mosman, NSW.

20 September, 1985 **Dull Day**

10 o'clock a.m. House shaken by thudding. Two Kookaburras taking turns to dive bomb a cork sheet filling in the balcony rails outside the kitchen window. They started where the cork is covered by 25 mm mesh but soon moved 70 cm to cork only. Working until 5.30 p.m. they made a hole right through the cork, about 38 mm diameter.

21 September **Rain**

Worked 7.30 a.m. to noon, enlarging their hole. Soon they would see that behind their hole was not the inside of a tree but a plastic bucket! So, replaced bucket with a box 203 mm by 203 mm by 457 mm, weighted with bricks.

22 September **Super Day**

Start 7.30 a.m., lunch 12.30 p.m. to 2 p.m. Finish 5.30 p.m. Hole enlarged to form a foot-hold.

23 September **Super Day**

6 a.m. start, breakfast 7 to 9 a.m. Work 9 to 11 o'clock. Lunch 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Work 1 to 3 p.m., "smoko" (?) 1 to 4 p.m., work 4 to 5 p.m. (Mostly male — blue sporran on rump).

24 September **Dull**

5.30 a.m. start, breakfast 8 to 10 a.m., work 10 a.m. to 10.30; off 10.30 to 11.30 a.m., work 11.30 a.m. to 12.30 p.m., off 12.30 to 3 p.m., work 3 to 5.30 p.m. Both working inside box.

25 September

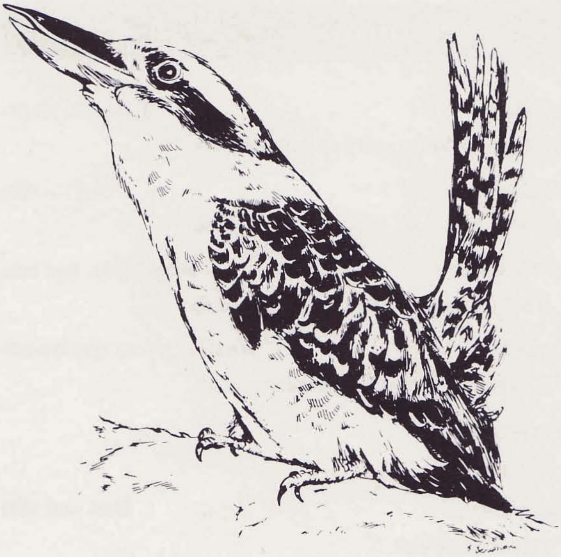
6.30 start, both working to 8.30; off till 10.30 a.m. Both working 10.30 a.m. to noon; off noon to 3 p.m. Male only working from 3 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. very diligent.

27 September **Super Day**

5.45 a.m. start -5.30 p.m. finish. Single tap-tapping. One bird only (?).

28 September **Super Day**

Tap-tapping from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., but with much time off.



Dacelo gigas — calling posture, head and tail up

29 September **Super Day**

Half-hearted tap-tapping from 8.30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Offer of sawdust to help bedding rejected and kicked out.

30 September **Dull**

6.30 a.m. to 8 a.m. Male gazes at the world from his doorstep.

1 October **Super Day**

6.30 a.m. to 5 p.m. desultory activity, mostly solo.

2 October **Super Day**

Very little work today.

3 October — 27°C **Super Day**

About 10 minutes work per hour.

4 October **Super Day**

About 10 minutes work per hour.

5 October **Dull**

6.30 a.m. start. Both busy all day, finishing 5.30 p.m.

6 October — Sunday **Dull**

Noon start, 4 p.m. finish.

7 October **Super Day**

6 a.m. start, fairly busy all day.

8 October **Shower a.m. — Dull**

5.45 a.m. start — but not a hard day.

9 October **Dull and warm**

8 a.m. to 4 p.m. very desultory work.

10 October **Dull — rain**

8 a.m. to 4 p.m. very desultory work.

11 October **Bright day, but rain**

8 a.m. to 4 p.m. very desultory work.

12 October **Weather — as day before**

8 a.m. to 4 p.m. very desultory work.

13 October

No signs ??

14 October **Dull and rain**

Occasional visit.

15 October **Clearing sunshine**

8 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. gentle tapping all day (more like pop-popping).

16 October **Super Day**

8 a.m. to 6 p.m. pop-popping and box-sitting.

17 October **Thunderstorm**

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. pop-popping and box-sitting.

18 October **Super Day**

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. pop-popping and box sitting.

19 October **Super Day**

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. pop-popping and box sitting.

20 October **Super Day**

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. pop-popping and box sitting.

21 October **Super Day**

4 a.m. until dusk, occasionally popping. Spent night in box (?).

22 October **Super Day**

8 a.m. (perhaps earlier) gentle popping. Negligible branch sitting or coming and going.

23 October **Rain**

24 hours gentle popping.

24 October to 27 October **Rain**

Gentle pop-popping throughout.

28 October **Dull**

Box sitting and gentle popping. Have moved 8 metres from perch branch to sit on Angophora.

29 October **Super Day**

Box sitting and gentle popping. Have moved 8 metres from perch branch to sit on Angophora.

30 October **Super Day**

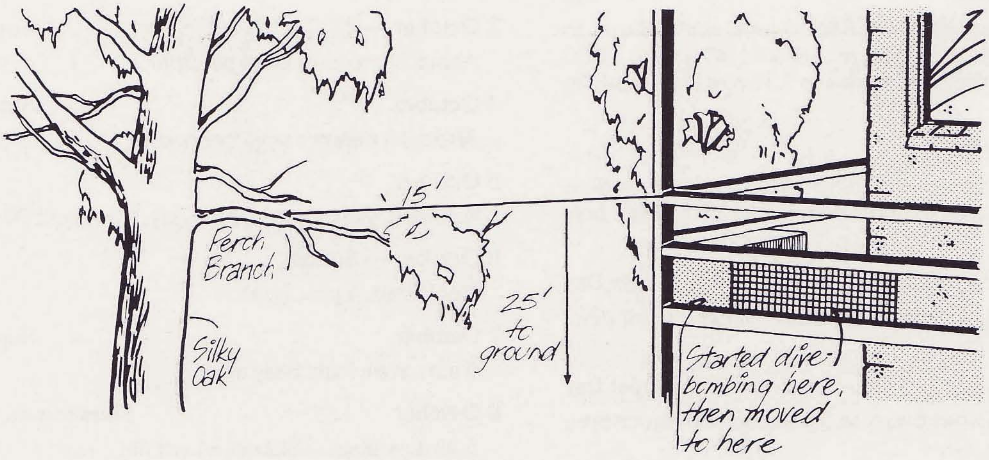
Box sitting and gentle popping. Have moved 8 metres from perch branch to sit on Angophora.

31 October **Super Day**

EGGS!! . . . two white bantam size, in centre of box. Pop-popping by both birds in turn.

1 November **Super Day**

Pop-popping by both birds all day.


15'
Perch Branch
Silky Oak
25' to ground
Started dive-bombing here, then moved to here

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2 November to 6 November **Super Day**

Pop-popping by both birds all day.

7 November **Warm and Humid**

24 hours pop-popping.

8 and 9 November **Super Day**

24 hours pop-popping.

10 November **Super Day**

Popping disturbing neighbours' sleep. Lynn Murphy: "Can't you chuck a rug over them — or something?" No rug, but pink cellular Whitney blanket, dog damaged, wrapped round box to deaden sound (slightly).

11 November **Dull**

24 hours popping.

12 November **Dull**

24 hour popping.

12 November **Super Day**

24 hour popping — but softer. Male bird fetched lizard to box.

13 November **Dull and Sticky**

24 hour popping. Male bird flew through kitchen.

14 November **Super Day**

Soft tapping. Lizard fetched to box.

15 November

Soft tapping. Lizard fetched to box.

16 November

Hatched! Eggs gone, no sign of shell. Cheeping. Two shifty looking "spivs", in "seedy rain coats", huddling at back of box.

17 November **Dull**

Male worked like "self-employed" fetching: lizards, snails, worms, cicadas and steak (the latter from stone house at the rear).

18 November **Rain and Dull**

Ditto — both birds (?).

20 November **Dull**

Feeding routine: bird (male mostly?) alights on Silky Oak, makes speech, holds up offering, makes another speech (still with mouth full), dives into box and is out again within seconds. No finesse about feeding. Occurs about every half-hour.

21 November **Dull**

Steak run (big house at back feeds birds steak cut into pieces about size of two peas). Routine: from box to Silky Oak perch, to neighbour's (Curtis') TV aerial, over Crawfords' (opposite) roof to feeding tray, and then back to perch via Murphy's and into box. About 2 minutes for round trip, but varies from 1 to 5 minutes.

22 November to 8 December

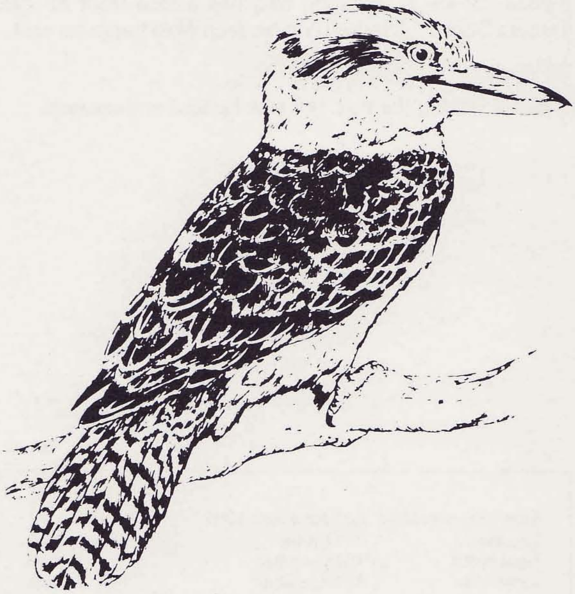
Food gathering routine by both birds. Young getting feathers. No more popping.

9 December to 13 December

Food gathering routine by both birds. Young getting feathers. No more popping.

14 December **Dull**

Big bird sitting in box hole. Similar to parent but shorter beak and fluffy — a young awaiting breakfast? Parent with lizard on perch ... but not delivering! 10.30 a.m. junior hopped onto near twig outside box. 30 minutes later flew almost a metre to branch then down to lime tree. Brother (sister?) watching all this with trepidation. Parents shouting encouragement. By 5.30 p.m. parents had both young on branch of Angophora for the night.



Laughing Kookaburra *(Dacelo gigas)*

science note

15 December

Practising flying: difficult with hardly any tail!.

16 December

Practising flying: difficult with hardly any tail!.

17 December

GONE! Moved to a tree in Pretoria Avenue. Nesting box inspected and photographed. The floor, for 2/3 of depth from front, packed nearly 2 cm deep with wood chippings. Back part bare board. Chippings from walls and back, in one corner these are nearly through. All quite sanitary. Restored box.

29 December

Young birds fly around daily. Fed by parents in Angophora. Continual squawking for food.

Adult bird with stripes on head showing interest in nesting box (doubt whether it is one of the parents) — lands on different twig in Silky Oak — also stripes on head are quite pronounced.

1 January, 1986 **Super Day**

Stripy visited box. Shouted on arrival on perch, sits, shouts, swoops to box, stays 5-10 seconds, swoops off.

2 January to 10 February

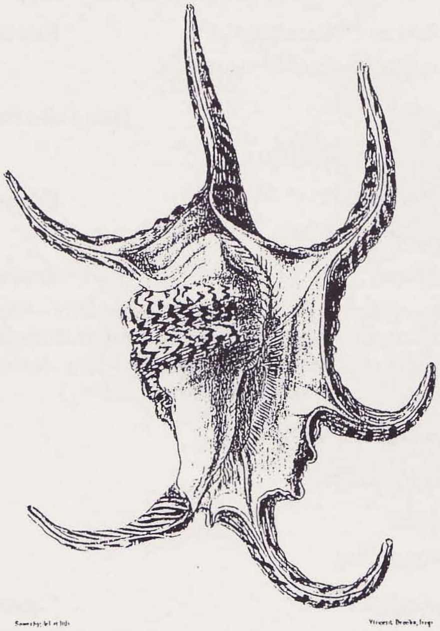
Young no longer squawk to be fed. Stripy regular visitor to box. Daily, often two or three times a day. Sometimes stays to do a little pop-popping. Twice has brought a companion. Stripy is moulting and has a face front on like Donald Duck . . . It remains to be seen what happens next.

24 April

Is still visiting the box, but with far less enthusiasm.

Start "dive-bombing"	20 September, 1985	
Lay eggs	31 October	Time lapse 41 days
Eggs hatch	16 November	16 days
Leave nest	14 December	28 days

section report



CONCHOLOGY

Far away places and haunts of more familiar Australian sites provide exciting finds for "shellers" in the Conchology section of the Royal Zoological Society. Visits to Western Australia by two members recently provided the section with some absorbing information when Des Beechey and Janette Fowler talked about shelling in that State.

The Sydney Sheller, monthly journal of the Conchology section, carried a fascinating account of life on Easter Island, including the legendary gigantic statues — Moai — and how these were created and erected. The article, written by Bernice Beechey, describes the interesting molluscan fauna, one species of which, *Cyprea englerti*, can only be collected by diving and is highly revered by the islanders who call it "Father Sebastian's Cowry", after the priest who spent over 30 years on the island.

Jules Leroi gave a talk to the April gathering of the section on shelling in the Cook Islands. In May, Roy Moylan will give a talk on shelling in the Solomons.

The Conchology section of the RZS of NSW meets on the third Saturday of each month, at 2.00 p.m. in the Society's rooms at Taronga Zoo. Section membership is open to all members of the RZS. Inquiries to the Section Chairman, Mr F. McCamley, phone: 546 5340, or the Section Hon. Secretary Mr J. Leroi phone: 440 8077.